

## Chapter 5

# Food Cultural Values: An Approach to Multiculturalism and Interculturality

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### ABSTRACT

*The present chapter presents the results of a study carried out within the Romanian culture and civilization classes taught to the foreign students in the preparatory year. Our goal was not only to familiarize them with Romanian culture, but also to help them better interact and function as a homogeneous group, in spite of their cultural diversity. The paper aims at studying to what degree cultural diversity and identity marks specific to students coming from various countries can be used to facilitate their adaptation to the culture and mentality of the host country and to a multicultural group. Among many aspects regarding Romanian traditional culture and civilization, we included information related to Romanian food and eating habits. Such a topic cannot be neglected if we take into account the fact that individual needs constitute a real issue in the adaptation of a multicultural group to a new culture and lifestyle.*

### INTRODUCTION

One of the main features of the 21st century is the flexibility of the cultural borders, facilitated by the new adjustments within the geo-political context which requires a new approach to the cultural values all over the world. This implies not only the need to explore and to understand diversity configuring cultural identities, but also to accept, to adapt, to integrate the cultural values and to reevaluate the limits of (in) tolerance regarding these values. In fact, the *concept of globalization* widespread and intensely debated during the last decades consists in a certain cultural versatility rather than an increased sensitivity to the cultural background of *the others*, leading to the change of the cultural environments due to exchanging, sharing and even standardizing values (i.e. the concern about cultural identity – globalization/cultural identity).

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Awareness of cultural differences, acceptance and tolerance to the others' culture have developed within multicultural communities and determined the interaction, transformation and moulding of cultural values. Intercultural processes have deepened as a response of the national cultures to be in accordance with the realities of the contemporary world: "Interculturality is defined as critical participation in communication, being aware that the assumption of culture as a watertight compartment related to nation-states or certain social groups is a fallacy whereas diversity is the feature which characterises reality." (Saez, 2002, p. 106)

Educational systems all over the world reflect all these reshaping trends as they have to identify solutions to adjust themselves by reevaluating contents, conceiving coherent policies, strategies, providing proper instruments and finding new ways to deal with human and material resources. Recent theoretical approaches and applied research emphasized the need for multicultural education implying all the actors (researchers, teachers and learners) involved in the educational process. Multicultural education is defined as "a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students [...] a concept that incorporates cultural diversity and provides equality in educational institutions. [...] The diverse cultural background of students is as important in developing effective instructional strategies as their physical and mental capabilities are." (Litheko SRS, 2007, pp. 3-4)

Some essential aspects related to multicultural education involve varied perceptions about diversity, the impact of diversity on the educational process, and more importantly, the way the trainers or trainees, should deal with these in order to achieve positive results. Specialists have outlined the necessity to identify, to profoundly analyze this issue and to propose solutions in order to meet cultural challenges.

Acknowledging the issues connected to differences and variety (race, class, ethnicity, social values, cultural experiences, educational qualifications, gender, age etc.) is not enough in order to effectively function within a multicultural environment. The educational system should provide individuals with models, examples, skills and competences to behave, to react and to cope with the challenges, situations, circumstances, expectations, needs etc. that delineate a multicultural context: "The purpose of multicultural education is to attach positive feelings to multicultural experiences so that each learner will feel included and valued and will feel friendly and respectful toward people from other ethnic and cultural groups." (Sultana, 2011, p. 115)

To better understand these challenges is important to realize that the syntagma *multicultural context* covers, in fact, a variety of typologies involving differences of races, ethnic and religious groups made up of individuals coming from different geographical areas.

As regards teaching in a multicultural class, it should be mentioned from the beginning that each class of this kind represents a new challenge because of the heterogeneity of the groups whose structure changes each year, which means that the teacher has to face new cultures constantly. When referring to a multicultural environment, it should also be taken into account that a teacher does not deal with an abstract and unchanging entity, but with a medium submitted to a dynamic situation implying continuous reshaping and adjustment. In addition, a multicultural medium refers in essence to people who are characterized not only by their national culture, but also by regional, communitarian, family and group cultures which influence and mould them as unique individuals. As a consequence, the way in which the cohesion of the group is realized or not, the interpersonal relations are established or not, cooperation and even friendship are initiated or not depends on the teachers' competence and, most of all, on the composition of the group.

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